

Redmond Planning Commissioner

March 22, 2017

To: Planning Commission

CC: Lori Peckol, Kim Dietz and Jeff Churchill

Re: Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code amendments for the Marymoor Subarea, including Local Center designation

As you know, I have voted in favor of the recommendations of the planning commission, and will be voting in favor of the report as written. However, as I noted when casting my vote, there are some issues that for me that remain un-resolved. As such, I am adding my comments to the Planning Commission report.

First, let me compliment the staff and planning commission liaison (Sherri Nichols) who tirelessly worked this process, and ultimately guided the planning commission through a complex and technical issue. The outcome is good, and the work done was excellent. In addition, please note that I add my comments as an individual planning commissioner, and not as the chair. As the Planning Commission is an advisory body, it is appropriate that we provide broad input for City Council consideration, and this memo is so intended.

BRIEF HISTORY

To start, I have a specific historical perspective as I was the Planning Commission liaison during the 2014 process when we first started reviewing the Marymoor area. I recall that we saw this area to have incredible potential. We recognized that the Marymoor planning area was next to both a large regional park, as well as next to a future light rail station. Because of that location, the city had a unique opportunity to re-vision the Marymoor area in the mid- and long-term horizon. We also understood that at present it is an area with material industrial and business park use, and included stakeholders that deserved and required protection during this desired change.

In the end, we envisioned an area that over time would transition to more residential, and a more unique commercial/industrial district. As I recall, we even had conversation around if this area could include some areas that migrate to industrial/commercial in such a way that the development might even be attractive to pedestrian activation. Industrial/art studio/etc? Admittedly the last idea is hard to describe, let alone accomplish. However, the sentiment was that the larger Marymoor area has potential to be something different than it is today.

In addition to the proposed outcome noted above, the planning commission strives to see all sides. As such, another equally important outcome was that we wanted to protect current property owner's rights, and not force them to convert in the near term. Conversion to a different use should remain in the control of the property owner, supported from an economic/market standpoint.

Where we are today

The plan that is forwarded to city council is good, but I still do not believe we accomplished all we can. I would urge City Council to provide specific study around certain topics. These include 1) Mechanisms to

allow property owners to be partners in the vision for the future of Marymoor 2) Specific Land Use 3) Transportation and the Light Rail Station.

Lastly, one item I want to clearly point out. It was mentioned to me on more than one occasion that the Planning Commission was possibly seeking to transform Marymoor into another downtown Redmond, or Overlake Village. While I did observe (and participated in) discussion around density among other issues, the intended outcome was to not create just another high-rise district. However, as you will see in the following comments, I still believe we can do more.

Overall, the vision that I took away from the larger multiple year process is that we 1) have a unique opportunity to see a new long term vision for Marymoor and 2) We want to protect current property owner interests. My comments for consideration follow:

Mechanisms to allow property owners to be partners in the vision for the future of Marymoor

I recognize that the way to accomplish change in an area is to provide the property owner benefit and incentive to have their property re-develop with a use that fulfills the future vision of the area. The Planning Commission discussed ways in which that could be accomplished, but for me, the outcome is still not where I would have hoped. We did explore added site density, but this results in the risk of seeing the area end up more like downtown and/or Overlake. Again, this is not the goal. So, the question to City Council is are there other ways in which we can incent the property owners to become desirous of re-developing (or selling at a premium) to a use more in line with the long-term vision. While the plan moves in that direction, I do not think we have ended up with an outcome that allows for creative partnerships between the city and the current property owners.

Land Use

All along, I seek a plan that supports a new and creative district that capitalizes on the unique relationship of a regional park and a high-volume transit stop/park and ride. While we do include specific use components as outlined in our plan, I still hope for more. I continue to ask how we can end up with an integrated pedestrian activated area that includes a creative mix of residential (both Transit Orientated Development/TOD and non-TOD development), as well as creative use of industrial development. This has been accomplished in other areas around the region, and around the country. Instead, I agree we have TOD designated areas, residential areas, and industrial/business park areas, but the outcome “feels” bland to me. I would ask for further thought be given to higher emphasis on pedestrian activated outcomes. I would say this especially around the station stop, as well as in connection with the areas fronting the park, and corridors connecting through the area. We do have pedestrian plans, but the Marymoor district is a unique opportunity because of the regional park, the relationship to the station stop, and a large amount of planned residential.

Secondly, I would point out that we also have an opportunity around the industrial areas. Can we incent those property owners to allow their properties to somehow connect and support the larger vision of the area, and result in added options for creative use of the industrial space. Admittedly this is a topic not fully explored at the Planning Commission, but as I stepped back and looked at the outcome, this was one item that could still be explored.

Transportation and the Light Rail Station

I am concerned that we do not have enough coordination and planning around this issue. With a station stop and large garage, there will be material changes to this area. I urge added consideration and thought given to the relationship of the station stop and parking garage to the larger area. I realize there are still many unknowns, but there are also many knowns such as that there will be a large station stop, and a

large parking garage. I do not see that our plan fully considers the general impact, as well as possible specific impacts.

Closing Comments

The plan is good. The work done was all well intentioned, and the outcome is in a great direction. However, as a single planning commissioner, I would urge that the City Council include added thought and allow for more creativity in the planned outcome of Marymoor. In the end, we are setting up an area that will last for the next century or more. What do we want to leave as our legacy in this unique time?

Respectfully submitted

Scott F. Biethan